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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 109989

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/19/2019  
TAGS: PREL PTER MOPS KPKO UNSC LE IS  
SUBJECT: ENFORCING THE WEAPONS-FREE ZONE IN SOUTH LEBANON

REF: A. BEIRUT 1153  
1B. BEIRUT 1022

Classified By: NEA Acting A/S Ronald L. Schlicher  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) This is an action request. Please see paragraphs three and four.

Summary

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12. (C) Incidents like the July 14 explosion of a Hizballah weapons depot in Khirbat Selim, September 11 rocket attacks on northern Israel, and the events of October 12 in Tayr Falsayh further undermine Israel's confidence in UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) while highlighting the Lebanese government's inability or unwillingness to enforce the weapons-free zone in the south. Israel increasingly views another round of conflict with Hizballah as inevitable, though perhaps not imminent. Most recently, Lebanese media reported that three Israeli espionage devices were discovered inside Lebanon and destroyed on October 17-18. At the same time, Israeli overflights of Lebanon continue unabated. While recognizing the seriousness of Israeli violations of UNSCR 1701, UNIFIL and the Lebanese government should focus on the root cause of instability in south Lebanon: persistent contravention of the weapons-free zone.

Objectives

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13. (C/REL LEBANON AND UNIFIL) Embassy Beirut should approach appropriate senior Lebanese officials, including in the ministry of defense, Lebanese Armed Forces, and office of the president to deliver the following points. Embassy Beirut is welcome, at its discretion, to share the points with UNIFIL leadership.

-- We appreciate Lebanon's cooperation with UNIFIL to investigate the October 12 events in Tayr Falsayh and other recent security incidents in the south. We take these and all other possible violations of UNSCR 1701, including reports of Israeli espionage devices in south Lebanon, seriously.

-- However, there is a growing perception that the Lebanese government tolerates incidents like the July 14 explosion in Khirbat Selim and September 11 rocket launches. It is not simply a matter of investigating these events after they occur, but of taking steps to prevent them. Nor is it enough that unauthorized weapons are kept out of sight; they must be kept out of the south.

-- We are also concerned by allegations that the LAF allowed Hizballah to remove evidence from the Khirbat Selim and Tayr Falsayh sites and that UNIFIL's prompt access to the Khirbat Selim site was obstructed.

-- Hizballah's blatant disregard for the weapons-free zone, including its storage of weapons in populated areas, demonstrates callous disregard for the safety of Lebanese civilians and belies the group's claim to respect UNSCR 1701. We recognize that numerous armed groups are present in the south, but Hizballah's contravention of the weapons-free zone is by far the most egregious.

-- We also worry about Israel's response should it become convinced that the Lebanese government is not serious about enforcing the weapons-free zone, and that UNIFIL is hamstrung by the LAF's unwillingness to confront violations of UNSCR 1701.

-- It is time to take additional steps to enforce the weapons-free zone. We would be happy, at your request, to convene a private discussion between U.S. and Lebanese officials on this topic, including possible specific steps to improve enforcement.

-- We recognize Lebanon's difficult political and military position vis--vis Hizballah and other armed groups, but inaction risks another conflict with Israel, undermines UNIFIL, impedes UNSCR 1701 implementation, and damages the LAF and Lebanese government's credibility in Washington, with potential impact on Congressional support for future FMF requests.

-- (IF RAISED) We continue to urge Israel to end its overflights of the south, which also violate UNSCR 1701. However, incidents like Khirbat Selim and Tayr Falsayh support Israel's argument that overflights are necessary to monitor unauthorized armed activity south of the Litani.

¶4. (C) We also request that Embassy Beirut include in its response to this demarche suggestion for specific steps that the Lebanese government could take to improve enforcement of the weapons-free zone. These suggestions will be considered by the interagency and coordinated with proposed milestones for LAF performance in preparation for possible follow-on discussions with the Lebanese government and LAF.

Reporting Deadline

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¶5. (SBU) Embassy Beirut is requested to report the results of this demarche by October 30, 2009.

CLINTON